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Message Text

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PAGE 01 CANBER 05314 140734Z

21
ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-11 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03

SS-20 USIA-15 OMB-01 IO-14 SAJ-01 SAM-01 NIC-01 CU-05

DRC-01 /139 W
---------- 062505
R 140655Z AUG 74
FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3885
INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PFOR, AS, UR
SUBJECT: AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT ENCOUNTERS
BUMPS IN ITS RELATIONS WITH SOVIET UNION

REF: CANBERRA 5053

1. SUMMARY: YOUNG SOVIET VIOLINIST, GEORGI ERMOLENKO,
IS CENTER OF DRAMA IN PERTH OVER ALLEGATIONS HE SOUGHT
TO DEFECT BUT WAS PERSUADED TO RETURN TO SOVIET UNION
BY SOVIET OFFICIALS. TRADE UNIONS HAVE REFUSED TO
ALLOW AIRCRAFT CARRYING ERMOLENKO TO LEAVE PERTH UNTIL
HIS WISHES ARE CLEARLY DETERMINED. MEANWHILE, SOME FURTHER ECHOES
OF AUSTRALIAN DECISION TO RECOGNIZE SOVIET CONTROL OF
BALTIC STATES (REFTEL) CONTINUE TO BE HEARD AND SENATE
WILL DEBATE RESOLUTION AUG 14 CONDEMNING GOVERNMENT
ACTION. END SUMMARY

2. TWO RECENT INCIDENTS IN AUSTRALIA HAVE EMBARRASSED
EFFORTS BY LABOR GOVERNMENT TO IMPROVE RELATIONSHIP
WITH SOVIET UNION.
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PAGE 02 CANBER 05314 140734Z

Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005

Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005

3. ERMOLENKO "DEFECTION"-- UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH ARE STILL SOMEWHAT OBSCURE, GEORGI ERMOLENKO, AN 18-YEAR OLD VIOLINIST AND MEMBER OF STRING QUINTET OF MOSCOW MUSIC COLLEGE WHICH HAS BEEN VISITING PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA, REPORTEDLY DECLINED TO RETURN TO THE SOVIET UNION ON AUG 11. AFTER FOUR-HOUR INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR DIMITRI KABALEVSKY, IDENTIFIED AS SOVIET PRESIDENT OF INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR MUSIC EDUCATION WHO IS ACCOMPANYING QUINTET, AND MR. VALDIMIR ALEXANDROV, IDENTIFIED AS CULTURAL ATTACHE AT SOVIET EMBASSY, ERMOLENKO REPORTEDLY CHANGED HIS MIND AND DECIDED TO RETURN TO SOVIET-UNION. NOT CLEAR WHETHER NON-SOVIET RUSSIAN-SPEAKING OBSERVERS PRESENT AT INTERVIEW.

4. SUBSEQUENTLY, AUSTRALIAN TRADE UNION REPRESENTATIVES IN PERTH (FROM TRANSPORT WORKERS UNION, AIR TRANSPORT OFFICERS FEDERATION, AND FEDERATED CLERKS UNION) EXPRESSED DOUBT THAT ERMOLENKO HAD FREELY DECIDED TO RETURN HOME AND REFUSED TO ALLOW ANY AIRCRAFT CARRYING ERMOLENKO TO DEPART FROM PERTH FOR OVERSEAS. EVENING OF AUG 13 AUSTRALIAN BROAD-CASTING COMMISSION JOURNALIST, JUDY BATEMAN, PLAYED TAPE RECORDING OF CONVERSATION SHE HAD HAD WITH ERMOLINKO, IN WHICH YOUR VIOLINIST APPEARED TO SAY HE DID NOT RPT NOT WISH TO RETURN TO SOVIET UNION.

5. LIBERAL MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR CURTIN (PERTH METROPOLITAN AREA), R.V. GARLAND, HAS MOVED INTO CASE, AS HAVE NUMBER OF LAWYERS IN PERTH AREA, AND WRIT HAS BEEN TAKEN OUT BEFORE WESTERN AUSTRALIA SUPREME COURT BY UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA UNDERGRADUATES GUILD TO REQUIRE CLARIFICATION OF ERMOLENKO,S WISHES IN OPEN COURT. ISSUE HAS ALSO COME UP IN AUSTRALIAN SENATE (STILL IN SESSION, THROUGH HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES IS IN RECESS), WITH LABOR GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION SPARRING TO EXTRACT MAXIMUM POLITICAL ADVANTAGE FROM AFFAIR. SOVIET EMBASSY SPOKESMAN IN CANBERRA MADE STATEMENT AUG 13, STATING THAT SIX SOVIET CITIZENS IN MSUSIC GROUP
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(QUINTET AND, PRESUMABLY, PROFSSOR KABALEVKSY) HAVE BEEN PREVENTED FROM LEAVING AUSTRALIA, AND EMBASSY CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR SAFETY. AS OF AUG 14, ERMOLENKO AND REST OF QUINTET WERE STILL IN PERTH.

6. LABOR GOVERNMENT HAS SOUGHT TO PLAY DOWN ERMOLENKO CASE. IN STATEMENT BY DEPT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AUG 12, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, SENATOR WILLESEE, WAS

Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005

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QUOTED AS BEING "ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN" THAT ERMOLENKO HAD CHANGED HIS MIND FREELY. HE SAID FOREING AFFAIRS OFFICIALS WERE PRESENT AT TWO-HOUR MEETING WITH ERMOLENKO AND SOVIET OFFICALS. DFA SPOKESMAN SAID AUG 12, "WE'VE GOT TO REMEMBER THAT HE WAS ONLY 18. WE THINK THAT ONCE HE REALIZED HE WAS LEAVING HIS PARENTS AND THROWING AWAY A PROMISING CAREER, HE CHANGE HIS MIND."

7. SOVIET CONTROL OF BALTIC STATES- ABOVE INCIDENT TENDS TO REINFORCE OPPOSITION TO AUSTRALIAN RECOGNITION OF SOVIET CONTROL OF BALTIC STATES (REFTEL).
-AUSTRALIAN SENATE WILL DEBATE ON AUG 14 RESOLUTION CONDEMING LABOR GOVERNMENT FOR RECOGNIZING SOVIET CONTROL O BALTIC STATES. DEBATE WILL BE EMBARRASSMENT FOR GOVERNMENT, SERVE AS REMINDER THAT GOVERNMENT DOES NOT CONTROL SENATE, AND PROBABLY CONSOLIDATE OPPOSITION INFLUENCE AMONG BALTIC COMMUNITY IN AUSTRALIA.

8. COMMENT: ERMOLENKO CASE IS BRIEF FLURRY WHICH WILL PRESUMABLY SUBSIDE SHORTLY. HOWEVER, EPISODE REFLECTS CONTINUING PROBLEM LABOR GOVERNMENT HAS WITH SUCH MATTERS. CONVENTIONAL WISDOM IN AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY IS THAT DEFECTION IN 1949 OF MR. VLADIMIR PETKOV, THE THIRD SECRETARY OF SOVIET EMBASSY IN CANBERRA, WAS ESSENTIALLY A FAKE ARRANGED BY THE THEN LIBERAL-COUNTRY PARTY GOVERNMENT TO SERVE ITS POLITICAL INTERESTS. LABOR PARTY THEREFORE TENDS TO VIEW WITH SUSPICION ANY ALLEGED CASE OF DEFECTION THOUGH LABOR GOVERNMENT HAS ACCEPTED INTO AUSTRALIA TWO FORMER MEMBERS OF HUNGARIAN ICCS CONTINGENT IN SAIGON WHO DEFECTED IN SOUTH VIET-NAM AND SOUGHT ASYLUMIN AUSTRALIA.HOWEVER, SOME AUSTRALIAN
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TRADE UNIONS CONTINUE TO BE STAUNCHLY ANTI-COMMUNIST, AS EVENTS IN PERTH INDICATE , DESPITE VIEWS OF LABOR PERTH AS A WHOLE.
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